

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LIMA 4156

E.O.11652: GDS
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SUBJECT: ELECTION UPDATE

REF: (A) LIMA 4044, (B) LIMA 3680

SUMMARY: THE ELECTORAL FOCUS SHIFTS FROM THE OUTCOME OF THE JUNE 4 VOTE TO ITS POSSIBLE IMPACT ON A MUCH-RUMORED NEW MILITARY-CIVILIAN POLITICAL ARRANGEMENT THAT MAY BE IN THE OFFING (SEPTTEL). THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND FEARS OF A "WAVE OF VIOLENCE" FOLLOWING ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEW AUSTERITY MEASURES CONTINUE TO BE IMPORTANT FACTORS IN THE POLITICAL EQUATION EX-PRESIDENT BELAUNDE'S AP PARTY WILL DECIDE SHORTLY WHETHER OR NOT TO SUPPORT ANY OF THE CONTENDING PARTIES. THE CAMPAIGN IS MARRED BY SOME OUTBURSTS OF VIOLENCE BUT VOTER APATHY AND INDECISION ARE FAR MORE PREVALENT. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING THE PAST WEEK, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DEBATE CONTINUE ON THE SIZE OF THE 12 CONTENDING PARTIES' SUPPORT BUT INCREASINGLY LINKED THIS SPECULATION TO THE LIKELIHOOD OF A NEW MIXED GOVERNMENT OF CIVILIANS AND MILITARY (SEPTTEL). APRA CANDIDATE ENRIQUE CHORINOS TOLD THE PRESS THAT A NEW
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GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE FORMED TO "LEGITIMIZE" MORALES BERMUDEZ AND RULE UNTIL THE GENERAL ELECTIONS. (APRA OFFICIALLY DISASSOCIATED ITSELF FROM THIS POSITION WHICH CHORINOS HAD DESCRIBED AS "PERSONAL.") A MIXED GOVERNMENT OF EXPERTS GAINED THE ENDORSEMENT OF PPC LEADER LUIS BEDOYA REYES (REF B) AND THE RIGHTIST PARTY MDP. THE LEFTIST PSR DENOUNCED THIS IDEA AS A PLOT TO FRUSTRATE THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE AND CONTINUED

ITS INSISTENCE THAT "THE VISTOR" IN THE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS
ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR GOVERNING (LIMA 3912).

2. THE MAY 11 RETURN TO LIMA OF FOREIGN MINISTER DE LA PUENTE
HAD MADE IMMINENT CIVILIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE CABINET THE
"RUMOR OF THE DAY." THE INCREASING TALK OF BRINGING CIVILIAN
"EXPERTS" INTO KEY GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES HAD PREDICTABLY
PROVOKED FEAR ON THE LEFT. THE ULTRA LEFT UDP'S WEEKLY
"MARKA" HAS LAUNCHED ANOTHER CALL FOR A POPULAR LEFTIST FRONT
TO MEET THIS NEW "RIGHTIST-IMPERIALIST" THREAT.
MEANWHILE, THE GOP HAS BEGUN EFFORTS TO OBTAIN A LABOR PACT SECURING
SOCIAL PEACE.
LEADERS OF THE THREE DEMOCRATIC LABOR
CONFEDERATION (CTP, CNT, AND CTRP) MEET MAY 15 TO DISCUSS
THIS GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE.

3. THE FIRST SET OF AUSTERITY MEASURES HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED
WITHOUT SERIOUS POPULAR REPERCUSSIONS (SEPTOL) BUT THERE IS
WIDESPREAD BELIEF THAT A SECOND, MORE HARSH ROUND OF MEASURES,
I.E. SUBSTANTIAL INCREASES IN GASOLINE, CUTS IN FOOD SUBSIDIES,
AND FURTHER DEVALUATION OF THE SOL, ARE IMMINENT. GOP VICE MINISTER
OF LABOR AND A PROMINENT APRISTA LEADER BOTH FEAR THAT ANNOUNCE-
MENT OF THESE UNPOPULAR MEASURES BEFORE JUNE 4 COULD SPARK
VIOLENCE AND PROVOKE REPRESSION. THEY ALSO FEEL THAT A
SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION OF THE UNDECIDED VOTE MIGHT THEN BE
MOVED TO VOTE "LEFT" AS A PROTEST. AT THIS STAGE, IT APPEARS MORE
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LIKELY THAT THE GOP WILL POSTPONE THESE UNTIL AFTER JUNE 4.

4. CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE BETWEEN THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT ALMOST
UNABLE TO ACT AND WARNINGS FROM THE LEFT THAT WORKERS WILL
NOT GIVE UP EASILY THE GAINS MADE DURING THE EARLIER PHASE
OF THE REVOLUTION, ARE PARTIES SUCH AS APRA AND PPC. AN
APRA CANDIDATE TOLD EMBOFF MAY 10 THAT HIS PARTY CANNOT
RESPONSIBLY MATCH DEMAGOGIC CLAIMS BY LEFTISTS TO PROVIDE EASY
AND PAINLESS SOLUTIONS TO THE ECONOMIC CRISIS, ESPECIALLY
SINCE APRA MAY WELL FIND ITSELF AS PART OF A GOVERNMENT WITH
A MANDATE TO PROVIDE REAL SOLUTIONS.

5. EX-PRESIDENT BELAUNDE'S AP PARTY IS SCHEDULED TO DECIDE
MAY 13 WHAT TO RECOMMEND TO ITS MEMBERS CONCERNING THE ELECTIONS.
SOME POPULISTAS ARE CALLING FOR A VOTE OF CONSCIENCE (COUPLED WITH
THE OBSERVATION THAT NO RPT NO AP SUPPORTER WOULD VOTE FOR ANY
OF THE LEFTIST PARTIES), RUMORS CONTINUE TO CIRCULATE THAT
BELAUNDE WILL THROW HIS SUPPORT TO BEDOYA REYES IN THE FINAL
DAYS OF THE CAMPAIGN. WHETHER THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF BELAUNDE
OR HIS PARTY WILL INFLUENCE AP VOTERS IS STILL ANOTHER OPEN
QUESTION.

6. THE ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN MARRED BY OCCASIONAL OUTBREAKS OF VIOLENCE BY PARTISAN SUPPORTERS OF RIVAL PARTIES. MAY 7 FIGHTING AND GUNFIRE BROKE OUT DURING AN APRA RALLY IN VILLA SAN SALVADOR, ONE OF LIMA'S MAJOR SLUMTOWNS, BETWEEN APRISTAS AND MEMBERS OF THE FAR-LEFT UDP PARTY. A NUMBER OF APRISTAS, INCLUDING SEVERAL ASSEMBLY CANDIDATES, WERE DETAINED BY POLICE FOR TWO DAYS. IN THE TRUJILLO AREA, FIGHTING BROKE OUT BETWEEN SUPPORTER OF CORNEJO CHAVEZ'S PDC AND APRA PARTISANS (TRUJILLO IS A LONG-TIME APRA STRONGHOLD) DURING PDC RALLIES IN THE CITIES OF CHICLAYO AND TRUJILLO. IN CHIMBOTE, UDP PROTESTED ATTACKS BY "APRISTAS" WHO IN TURN ACCUSED UDP OF "AGGRESSION." OVERALL, THE INCIDENCES OF VIOLENCE ARE STILL RELATIVELY FEW AND HAVE BEEN EASILY CONTROLLED BY THE POLICE.

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7. AMONG THE GENERAL POPULACE, THE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN HAS SPARKED ONLY MODEST INTEREST. DURING RECENT EMBOFF TRIP TO AREQUIPA, PUNO AND CUZCO--MAJOR CITIES IN THE SOUTHERN HALF OF PERU--LITTLE ENTHUSIASM FOR THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS WAS OBSERVED. POLITICAL RALLIES DRAW MANY MORE PASSIVE BYSTANDERS THAN PARTISAN SUPPORTERS. TALKS WITH FARMERS AND WORKERS SHOWED THAT THE COST OF LIVING RATHER THAN PARTISAN POLITICS WAS THE MAIN CONCERN. PERHAPS IN AN EFFORT TO COUNTER THIS APATHY, THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION RECENTLY ISSUED STERN WARNING ABOUT THE PENALTIES FOR NOT VOTING.

8. COMMENT: IRONICALLY, AS THE MILITARY AND POLITICIANS BECOME MORE PERSUADED THAT THE ELECTION WILL AFFECT THE COMPOSITION AND ACTIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE NEAR TERM, RECENT POLLS SUGGEST PERHAPS HALF OF THE VOTERS SEEM TO HAVE ACCEPTED THE INITIAL GOP THESIS THAT THE ASSEMBLY WILL DEAL ONLY WITH CONSTITUTIONAL PRESCRIPTIONS AND PROBLEMS. THE CONTINUED INDICATIONS OF A 40 TO 50 PERCENT UNDECIDED BOTE (A GREATER NUMBER THAN COULD BE EXPLAINED BY AP'S WITHDRAWAL) SUGGESTS THAT NAME RECOGNITION AND PREVIOUS VOTING HABITS MAY PLAY A VERY IMPORTANT ROLE IN WHAT MAY BE A SUPUR-OF-THE MOMENT DECISION OF THE PERUVIAN VOTER JUNE 4.
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